

A Clash of Paradigms: Is American Literature Still Postmodern?

An Honors Thesis (HONR 499)

by

Jenny Fletcher Mannette

Thesis Advisor

Dr. Brent Blackwell

**Ball State University
Muncie, Indiana**

May 2019

Expected Date of Graduation

May 2019

ABSTRACT

The American literary world becomes more complex with each passing movement, as specific trends peak and die off, only to rise in prominence decades later. This complexity results in a muddled timeline in which there is no general consensus on when certain literary movements began and ended, such as modernism and postmodernism. While these movements apply in other disciplines in addition to literature, their characteristics differ depending on which one is under discussion and the movements do not always affect all disciplines at the same time. Analyses of *For Whom the Bell Tolls* (1940), *Adventures of a Young Man* (1962), *Catch-22* (1961), *Slaughterhouse-Five* (1969), and *Lincoln in the Bardo* (2017) demonstrate that current American literary works more closely follow the principles of modernism rather than postmodernism, despite the latter occurring more recently and having more influence on other disciplines.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to thank my thesis advisor, Brent Blackwell, for guiding and advising me throughout the course of this project. He provided me with a lot of helpful advice and resources that made completing this extensive task much more enjoyable and insightful.

And I also thank my mother for continuously offering me support and encouragement as I completed this challenging project.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Process Analysis Statement	1
The Postmodern Paradigm Shift	5
Criteria	8
Self-Containment vs. Intertextuality.....	8
Determinacy vs Indeterminacy	9
Structured Timeline vs Chaotic Timeline.....	10
Reflection vs Indifference	11
Other Considerations	12
<i>For Whom the Bell Tolls</i>	13
<i>Adventures of a Young Man</i>	17
<i>Catch-22</i>	21
<i>Slaughterhouse-Five</i>	25
<i>Lincoln in the Bardo</i>	31
Conclusion	39
Bibliography	41

PROCESS ANALYSIS STATEMENT

The topic of this thesis was inspired by the last course in the Honors Humanities Sequence, *Inquiries in the 19th, 20th, and 21st Centuries* (HONR 203). This class presented the current U.S. society and culture through an unusual view, one that prodded to the roots of both the modern and postmodern movements and questioned what values and ideas formed the foundation of our society as we see it today. I wanted to return and explore these concepts with the new perspective I have gained through my other classes, especially since the main subject of the class, postmodernism, has not been on the forefront of my mind since concluding that class. This thesis provided a great opportunity to research it further with a more focused purpose.

When I first met with my thesis advisor, we established a plan of the literary pieces I would analyze. We originally decided that four books would be most suitable since that would provide enough texts for analysis without going over the time constraint of a single semester. And we wanted each text to have some characteristics in common, so that each analysis would be able to contribute to a larger picture, rather than just amount to four unrelated analyses. These characteristics were: (1) that the book must be written by an American author since the purpose of this thesis is to gauge how modern or postmodern American literature is, and (2) that each book must explore the themes or issues of war or is set during it. This setting was chosen because it provides an interesting backdrop to explore various societal values and issues around death, the economy, and the importance of individuals versus the importance of their community. This broad subject range is possible because war as a setting can bring out both the best and worst sides of individuals and simultaneously reaffirm and challenge their values and ideals.

This plan was slightly altered when I realized that we had not added a piece that was more current; this was quite an oversight considering this thesis' point was to explore how prevalent postmodernism is in today's literature, rather than the mid-to-late twentieth-century literature. I searched for novels that fit the two criteria stated above and which was published in this century. After finding a promising one, I alerted my advisor, and we added that novel to the plan, which resulted in a total of five analyses.

In addition to analyzing these novels for their modern and postmodern characteristics, I read through approximately thirty external critiques and analyses about the chosen novels and their authors, as well as pieces revolving around the two movements of modernism and postmodernism. These external sources were either suggested or provided by my thesis advisor, or found on my own, and each was helpful for giving me a deeper understanding for how the authors crafted their stories, and how modernism and postmodernism's various elements contributed to the movements themselves and their literary impact. I would try to read a few analyses for each novel I read after I finished it, and before writing my own analyses of it.

These sources were pivotal for creating the means through which I would analyze each piece. I knew I would need to set up a list of modern and postmodern criteria to use to make the evaluation process as objective as possible. My advisor provided a very helpful starting source whose author had created his own set of criteria. I used that list and the other sources to develop my own list of criteria. I originally started with more than the four sets of criteria I ended up using, but that was after I cut out the criteria that I was not using. The criteria used in the thesis now were all used substantially and provided a higher rate of quality than I would have delivered if I had forced myself to use criteria that did not significantly contribute to any of the chosen novels.

One of the more interesting things I have learned while completing this project was that I tend to have great moments of insight when I apply what I am learning and exploring to my daily life. This might seem an obvious concept to most, but I am referring more so to accidental applications rather than purposeful ones where I directly aim to apply what I am learning. And that notion of accidental application was reaffirmed during this thesis, as there were a few concepts of postmodernism that I did not understand at the beginning of this semester, but which clicked for me when I was simply relaxing in my leisure time and thought about these concepts and applied them to the things I was watching and reading. Those moments of insight were completely accidental but so helpful because the whole point of this thesis was to determine whether postmodern was still present in the current day and age. And I realized that my focus was so set on the literary aspect of the thesis that I sometimes forgot this question was applicable to other mediums as well and that I could use those other insights to aid me in answering the question for literature. Once I realized that, it helped a lot of other confusing concepts connect, and having those moments of realization really showed me that what I was learning and analyzing in this thesis could be just as meaningful outside of it.

Some of the biggest struggles faced while completing the thesis mainly involved trying to understand all of the nuances of modernism and postmodernism, and how they applied to each piece I read and analyzed. While I had a class over postmodernism before, it was taken near the beginning of my college career; in addition to that, a vast majority of my honors classes were taken in my first semesters, so by junior year, I was only taking an honors class every other semester at most – and usually never more than one in a single semester. As a result, most of my latest classes have been for my major and minor, Computer Information Systems and Computer Science, neither of which challenged me in the same way an honors class would in regards to

changing and broadening my perceptions This disconnect made it quite difficult at times to analyze and categorize the works I read, and I found myself consistently struggling to determine whether I was accurately gauging a novel or understanding a specific idea. However, learning how to apply those ideas outside of the thesis helped on that front and heavily mitigated that struggle.

Upon this thesis' conclusion, I can confidently say the main takeaway or benefit I received from conducting my research and analyses is the newfound understanding I have for the way I think and perceive the external world. When I knew barely more than the basics of modernism and postmodernism, I thought the way of the postmodern thinker resonated more with me, but I realized that conclusion was wrong as I learned more about the differences between how modernists and postmodernists think. Now that I have improved my knowledge on these movements, I have come to realize my way of thinking more closely aligns with modernists, and that realization has helped me better understand my thought processes and the method behind them. In addition, I have observed a substantial improvement in my ability to notice connections in my daily life that I would not have otherwise had. Before undertaking this project, I would not have seen so many postmodern qualities in the shows and books I enjoyed. Noticing those characteristics now has helped me reach a better understanding of those works' meanings and how they are interpreted by today's audiences.

THE POSTMODERN PARADIGM SHIFT

Postmodernism is one of the most divisive and muddled cultural movements that has swept throughout the United States in recent history, and almost every aspect of it is painstakingly scrutinized and questioned, even the meaning behind its name. As a result, there have been many doubts about these conflicting qualities, but this conflict provides an opportunity to pin down at least one of these discrepancies. The main discrepancy that will be tested is the degree of postmodern influence in current literature, specifically in the United States of America. Through analyzing a few modern and postmodern works, we will determine how significant postmodernism is in modern-day works.

Before commencing with in-depth analysis, however, we must cover the state of the relevant literary movements' timelines and the degree of acceptance of those timelines. The first movement, modernism, has a timeline that is quite consistent between most historians and literary critics. However, postmodernism, the other movement that will be used during the analysis, suffers from a much larger variation.

Postmodernism is claimed to have several different originating times, depending on the analyst, historian, or writer. While the term's exact origin is unknown, a related term, "postmodernismo," was recorded in Federico de Onis' *Antología de la poesía española e Hispanoamericana* in 1934, but it was not used again until Dudley Fitts' *Anthology of Contemporary Latin-American Poetry* in 1942 (Hassan 85). Knowing these two separate instances in which a similar term is used, one might think it was generally agreed that postmodernism originated sometime in the early-to-mid 1900s. Yet, that is not the entire case, as historian Arnold Toynbee asserted in the second volume of his book, *A Study of History* (1933),

that postmodernism as a historical cycle began around 1875 instead (39). Adding the origin of postmodernism in American literature specifically complicates the timeline even further. By the 1950s, American society and culture exhibited the postmodern values and beliefs that accompanied its post-World War II condition, but most American authors did not adapt to this cultural shift and reflect the new paradigm in their works until later on, around a decade later (Qureshi 59). The movements of modernism, naturalism, and existentialism reigned as American literature's primary influencers throughout the mid-twentieth century and were not superseded until postmodernism began dominating the literary world in the 1960s. While a factor in these discrepancies results from different focuses for analysis, such as the field of literature versus history versus society, they show that postmodernism is by no means a solidly-defined movement in regards to its timing.

This state of uncertainty was the initial catalyst that spurred the questions of when postmodernism truly began in American literature and is postmodernism still a driving force for present-day American literature? To limit the scope of this thesis to a reasonable scale, we will agree with the simple majority determination and assume that postmodernism did indeed begin to influence American literature in the early-to-mid 1960s. However, the other question of whether it still has a substantial influence over today's American literature is still up for debate and will be determined at the project's conclusion.

The other movement that will be evaluated along with postmodernism is modernism. Modernism is a cultural and literary movement that is generally accepted to cover the time period between the early 1900s and the 1960s (Rahn). While there is still confusion over the exact dates for both the start and end of modernism, the deviation is not nearly as large as it is for postmodernism. And because the focus of this thesis is on postmodernism and its current

presence in American literature rather than modernism's, we will assume the range provided before establishes the proper boundaries of modernism.

To determine the prevalence of modernism and postmodernism throughout the supposed periods for the two movements, five books were evaluated for the degree to which they displayed modern and postmodern characteristics. These books consist of Ernest Hemingway's *For Whom the Bell Tolls*, John Dos Passos' *Adventures of a Young Man*, Joseph Heller's *Catch-22*, Kurt Vonnegut's *Slaughterhouse-Five*, and George Saunders' *Lincoln in the Bardo*.

The first two are widely accepted as modern novels, while the latter three are regarded as postmodern. However, the reasons for deeming *Catch-22* and *Slaughterhouse-Five* as postmodern differ vastly from the reason one would regard *Lincoln in the Bardo* as postmodern: critics view Vonnegut's novel as postmodernist due to both the time period of its creation and – more importantly – because the storytelling and narrative characteristics it displayed aligned with postmodernism more than any other literary movement. In contrast, *Lincoln in the Bardo* is only viewed as postmodern because of when it was published; since it is a much newer book than any other the others analyzed and its respective storytelling elements have received much less analysis than the others. That is why it will be used as a measure to determine whether American literature is still primarily influenced by postmodernism, if it has moved beyond its influence to a new movement, or if it has regressed to a previous movement like modernism. The degrees to which it displays modern and postmodern characteristics will be compared to the degrees of the other books to determine which movement steers American literature in the current time period.

Criteria

A set of criteria was developed in order to gauge how modern or postmodern each chosen work was. This set includes both modern and postmodern criteria, and there is a postmodern counterpart for every modern criterion. Each criterion used was either created by me as I explored the facets of modernism and postmodernism, or were tokenized by other writers and literary analysts. Many criteria were developed by Ihab Hassan in his work, *The Postmodern Turn: Essays in Postmodern Culture* (1987). He presented a thorough analysis of the emergence of postmodernism in many fields, including literary and architecturally, and along with that analysis, he developed an extensive list of modern and postmodern characteristics and elements. However, some of his entries were based solely on the trends he noticed in fields other than literature, such as art and music. Since this thesis is literary-focused, only criteria based on literary trends from both movements were used. The entire set of criteria is listed and described below, and it is explicitly noted if a criterion originated from an external source.

Self-Containment vs. Intertextuality

Intertextuality was a term originally coined by Julia Kristeva, a French philosopher, in the 1960s, and it has since been widely accepted by postmodern critics and theoreticians (Novak). Self-Containment is the antithesis to intertextuality and is more common in modern works. However, the term itself, “self-containment,” is not commonly used.

Self-containment is straightforward in its meaning and application to modern texts. Put simply, narratives that are self-contained can usually stand on their own, and readers should be able to understand it without having knowledge of external texts or sources. Self-contained

narratives refrain from making references to other works such as other novels, poems, analyses, etc.

Intertextuality is the opposite of self-containment and is a postmodernist element in which a relationship between various texts exists. The author can establish this relationship by mentioning, quoting, or even parodying other texts (Matteo). While intertextuality is not unique to postmodernism, it is one of the most extensively-used techniques in postmodern literature and thus serves as one of the movement's hallmarks.

Determinacy vs Indeterminacy

These two criteria have been used by a number of other historians, including, but not limited to Ihab Hassan and Martin Irvine, an associate professor in Georgetown University's Communication, Culture and Technology program.

In the modern perspective, “everything has a definite meaning or property. As a result, modernist literary works tend to bear explicit-to-the-reader aspects such as a clear division in time order, a neat narrative structure, a narrator with a determinate identity and closely related plots” (“Determinacy and Indeterminacy”). Modern literature tends to reflect these traits through determinacy, which is the quality of being definitive in regards to how each component of the narrative contributes to a larger picture. The author carefully crafted this narrative with a clear intent to deliver a specific message or present an overarching theme, and most of its components, including its characters and plot, are “determinate” or “dependent” on each other and connect to create specific interpretations or meanings that the audience should notice and understand (Irvine). The audience can have its own interpretations of certain events or other storytelling elements, but the author intended for his or her narrative to be interpreted in a specific light, and

any other interpretation of this is not the narrative's true meaning, the one actually intended by the author.

Indeterminacy references a wide range of concepts rather than a singular one, and it covers ideas like “ambiguity, discontinuity, heterodoxy, pluralism, randomness, revolt, perversion, [2nd] deformation.” (Hassan 92) While each inclusion on this list comes with its own connotations and related terms to consider, indeterminacy, as a whole, is another indicator that suggests that everything in a postmodern novel “is on the same level,” meaning that nothing has any more importance than another, and it all but discards the notions of needing themes or topics to guide the plot or characters (Ma 1340). An indeterminant narrative leaves most of its components up to the reader's interpretations and requires the readers to make their own judgments about the narrative's plot and characters.

Structured Timeline vs Chaotic Timeline

This set of criteria was not directly inspired by a historian or theorist; rather, it was created based on how time flows through both the modern and postmodern perspectives. It was determined to be a suitable criterion to use for this evaluation after the five novels read were discovered to have semblances of either the modern or postmodern part of these criteria.

A modern story utilizing a structured timeline does not necessarily mean that the entire narrative occurs chronologically; while it can signify a linear timeline, it also refers to how time is used and perceived within the narrative itself. A structured timeline in this context would mean that even while a character's internal monologue seems timeless, in that it can seem to last minutes or hours, the narrative provides external cues to time passing as it would (Taunton). Matthew Taunton suggests this cue can be established in signifiers of time such as the sun rising

or falling, the ticking of a clock, or a direct acknowledgment of a specific date or time. In addition to this, a structured timeline distinguishes between the past, present, and future, and there is a clear succession of one from another.

In contrast, the quality of a chaotic timeline is most often seen in postmodern works. Whereas a structured timeline interprets time as a standard construction with a constant rhythm and order to it, the chaotic timeline makes the case that time is a subjective construction affected by one's personality, and would thus be perceived differently by every person (Fedosova 79). When this concept is used in postmodern narratives, "events can change their order, move from the end to the beginning, step over certain intervals and stages, stop, freeze, stretch or compress. They can even disappear and at the author's will, appear again" (Fedosova 81). This utilization of time can lead to the narration seeming jumbled in regards to events occurring out of order and with seemingly no connections to the preceding and succeeding scenes. Many narratives that rapidly jump from one time to another with no warning, have an irregular time flow, or do not have clear distinctions between the past, present, and future have the qualities of a chaotic timeline.

Reflection vs Indifference

These terms have not been used by any other external source together as a set of contrasting modern-postmodern criteria, as far as I have found. However, many others have commented on the originating concept that inspired these two criteria, and it is one that actually serves as a similarity between both modernism and postmodernism.

This similarity between modern and postmodern works is the shared belief that nothing was truly knowable and that truth was "relative, conditional, and in flux" (Rahn). However, the

responses to that principle could not be more different, and these responses could be summarized through the conflict of modern reflection versus postmodern indifference.

A modern narrative would react to this knowledge by attempting to search for truth and meaning anyway, despite the futility of those efforts. Its characters will ponder their purpose in hopes of uncovering some discovery about themselves or the external world. In many cases, they acknowledge and subsequently agree with the principle of relative and conditional truth, and yet still expend effort trying to make sense of who they and the other characters are, and how the world works.

When “postmodernism displaced the narratives, morality, and ideals of modernism”, it also displaced the need for a connected narrative, and a “postmodern culture arose around entertaining nonsense” (J.S.). Literature repurposed this lack of sense into creating disjointed worlds and stories in which apathy reigns as the primary response to any indication of absolute truth. Characters will view attempts to find meaning where there may never be definitive meaning as futile and pointless. They may wonder about the hidden meanings and interpretations of themselves, other characters, and the situation as a whole, but this endeavor will usually be presented as a lighthearted conversation or banter, rather than a serious attempt to reach a conclusion.

Other Considerations

This is, by no means, an exhaustive list of every modern and postmodern characteristic. Both movements possess many others that will not be used to evaluate the five narrative works. Reasons for their exclusion include, but are not limited to: the characteristic having a similar degree of presence and importance in both movements, the characteristic is only significant in

another field like postmodern science or art and does not have a strong or any influence in postmodern literature, or the characteristic not having a significant presence in any of the five novels. In any of these cases, the end result of including another criterion would be negligible, since that criterion would not sway any of the novels in either movement's direction.

Some excluded characteristics may be discussed in relation to one of the criteria or during an explanation of how that characteristic affects a novel's meaning, but these characteristics will never be the primary criteria used for determining whether a novel is modern or postmodern.

For Whom the Bell Tolls

For Whom the Bell Tolls (1940) was written by Ernest Hemingway, and it follows Robert Jordan, an American volunteer fighting for the leftist republicans in the Spanish Civil War of the 1930s. The narrative occurs over the course of four days and three nights, during a mission to detonate a bridge.

This novel is usually classed as modernist, through both its own characteristics and through virtue of being written by Ernest Hemingway. Many credit Hemmingway for being one of the main innovators that brought modernism to the United States, and especially on the literary front (Lorcher). While *For Whom the Bell Tolls* was not either of the primary works that initially thrust him onto the modern scene like *The Sun Also Rises* and *Farewell to Arms*, it definitely shares some qualities with its predecessors – some of those qualities unique to Hemingway, and others more associated with the modern movement as a whole. In addition, the novel was published in the midst of the modern movement in 1940. As such, many signs point to it leaning towards modernism, but an analysis will reveal whether it displayed any postmodern characteristics along with the modern ones, and – if so – which ones.

Modernism

Determinacy

The strongest modernist indicator that *For Whom the Bell Tolls* boasts is the prevalence of determinacy in its narrative, and how that criterion is woven into the events and its characters.

This book has a strong existentialist theme, and many events and conversations contribute to this theme. Most of those instances relate to Robert Jordan's search for meaning in life. This conflict is primarily internal and gets more pronounced as the story proceeds. From the very beginning, it is made clear that Robert Jordan will go to great lengths to accomplish his mission and is willing to die for that cause (Hemingway 51). However, as the stakes rise higher, he is forced to start acknowledging the threat of death as a real likelihood. Given his early stoicism towards the topic whenever it was brought up, one might think he would barely show a reaction later. Yet, this recognition actually spurs him to show more resistance to the idea, and his acknowledgments of his death almost always ended with him thinking about how he would like to continue living with his girlfriend, Maria, after the mission (Hemingway 191). This conflict is resolved when he gracefully accepts his fate, realizes that he has lived a good life even if it was not long one, and commands the others to leave him to take on the fascist officers alone when they arrive (Hemingway 247).

Other instances that fit along with this theme are the various points throughout the story where the characters ponder the intricacies of a grand moral dilemma. For instance, both Robert Jordan and Anselmo muse over the morality of killing and the situational aspects that would need to be present to make such a criminal act "necessary," and if even the state of being

necessary excuses the action (Hemingway 108). These questions of life and death contribute to the grander question and theme, and ties the entire narrative together into one cohesive whole.

Reflection

The topics brought up above (existentialism and the morality of killing) would also contribute to the criterion of reflection, as there are no truths in any of those subjects that one could claim with absolute certainty.

The main aspect of this criterion to focus on, however, is the conflict that arises when the characters ponder over deep topics when they are aware that there is no true way to be sure of the conclusion they reach. Robert Jordan, in particular, will remind himself that while he may be able to guess why a certain character acts a certain way or what they are thinking, that he has no way of finding out if he is correct (Hemingway 10).

However, this knowledge that truth is relative is a characteristic of both modernism and postmodernism, so it does not sway *For Whom the Bell Tolls* in either direction yet. What really sets this novel apart from postmodernism and firmly roots it in modernism is the frequency in which the characters still attempt to draw meaning anyway, even while knowing full well the futility of their efforts.

This is a very typical trait found in Hemingway's works, as they often involve characters searching for meaning in a chaotic, disordered universe. Jake Barnes, the protagonist of *The Sun Also Rises*, exemplifies this as he struggles with his sense of self after sustaining an injury in World War I that left him impotent. His constant assertion that he was only "sick" implies his is only a temporary state of impotency rather than an irreversible change, and this attempt to reason

what happened to him and why it happened matches the modern characteristic of reflection almost perfectly (Hemingway 8).

Postmodernism

Intertextuality

For the most part, *For Whom the Bell Tolls* is quite self-contained. Most of the references that occur are callbacks to events or conversations that happened within the narrative itself rather than to an external source. But there are few instances of Hemingway referencing the external world within the main narrative, and the most memorable one is the novel's epigraph, the John Donne quote that inspired the novel's title to begin with, which provides the first lines that the audience will read:

No man is an Iland, intire of it selfe; every man is a peece of the Continent, a part of the maine; if a Clod bee washed away by the Sea, Europe is the lesse, as well as if a Promontorie were, as well as if a Mannor of thy friends or of thine owne were; any mans death diminishes me, because I am involved in Mankinde; And therefore never send to know for whom the bell tolls; It tolls for thee.
(Hemingway 2)

In another minor intertextuality instance, Hemingway indirectly references himself. This occurs when Robert Jordan points out that Pilar is a better story-teller than Quevedo after she gives her account of the matador Finito, and how Jordan wished he could write well enough to deliver it as well as she has. Yet, since Hemingway actually did write the story and delivered it in written form, he is indirectly telling the audience that he is better than Quevedo and Robert Jordan on the story-telling front (Hemingway 134).

Verdict

For Whom the Bell Tolls is widely regarded as a pinnacle of modernism, and I must agree with that conclusion. The pervasiveness of its modern characteristics outshine its few

postmodern qualities in practically every aspect of the narrative, including its characters, plot, theming, and structure. It can only boast one main postmodern criteria, that one being intertextuality, and comparing it to the modern criteria it received, it is clear that the modern criteria affect the meaning of the novel and its narrative more than intertextuality. Moreover, the uses of intertextuality were short, one-line, offhand references that did not have any long-lasting impacts on the narrative and which were ultimately quite negligible to the final product.

Adventures of a Young Man

This novel chronicles the protagonist, Glenn Spotswood's, continuous disillusionment with American culture, politics, and society and its values. Like *For Whom the Bell Tolls*, this story is set during the Spanish Civil War, with its protagonist also serving as an American volunteer in that war.

Adventures of a Young Man (1962) is expected to have a heavy lean towards modernism, due to the time of its release as well as its author's, John Dos Passos', association with modernism. His *U.S.A* trilogy is viewed as a culmination of his full participation and experience within literary modernism, and it would not be surprising if the characteristics that designated that trilogy as a modern pinnacle were present here as well (Pizer).

Modernism

Determinacy

The primary modern criterion *Adventures of a Young Man* fulfills is determinacy, and it accomplishes that through how often its characters push or encourage one of its most prominent themes, the separation between different parties and classes.

The narrative constantly references this division, and characters discuss it numerous times in relation to their beliefs on how society is, how it can be improved, and individual contributions they can make to the movement or party that has a higher claim to their faith and loyalty. Glenn, in particular, commits himself often to the plight of the working class, even going as far as to want to take up another assignment in Slade County, the same place in which he suffered a brutal beating that landed him in the hospital “with his ribs strapped up and his jaw in plaster of Paris and his head swathed in itchy gauze” (Dos Passos 194). Despite this, he wanted to return to the same county to continue serving the movement (Dos Passos 199). Glenn’s fierce loyalty to the working class movement provides an ever-present undertone in the novel, adds tension to the rising political tensions that arise throughout the novel, and keeps that theme of societal hierarchy on the forefront of the audience’s minds.

Another aspect of this theme that Dos Passos discusses is the perceived inability of those subjected to the system to move up in it and climb the social ladder, so to speak. Characters like Mrs. Elgin will propose beliefs like “no amount of education can change a poor white” that suggest pointlessness in the dreams of those stuck in the lower classes to rise above them (Dos Passos 45). The static nature of this broken system is reflected in the upper classes as well, and this shown when Glenn speaks to his father about his future. His father claims that Glenn did not “belong to the working classes. If there’s such a thing as the professional class, that’s where we fit” (Dos Passos 109). The fact that his father is not aware of what class they would belong to if the professional class is not an option, illustrates the strength of the average character’s conviction to the idea of this immovability. This lends itself well to explaining Glenn’s intense motivation to contribute as much as possible to the movement.

Reflection

This novel displays the reflection criterion in a similar manner to *For Whom the Bell Tolls*, through the characters' search for the meaning or purpose of their lives. However, reflection in *Adventures of a Young Man* feels much more uncertain. Robert Jordan was intrinsically motivated to fulfill his mission, his purpose at the time, due to his loyalty to the Republic and the values that side represented. Glenn Spotswood, in contrast, is extrinsically motivated. He constantly displays a drive to keep reaching new heights, whether that was finishing college, finding a better job, or gaining a new calling within the Communist party but when he stopped to reflect on why he felt the ambition to accomplish those tasks, his conclusions were hesitant or brutally honest: "Well, I don't know what I am" (Dos Passos 88). This statement shows that he lacked a fundamental understanding of his internal motivators and desires near the beginning of his life.

Postmodernism

Intertextuality

While not the main focus of the narrative, *Adventures of a Young Man* makes a few references to external sources. One of the larger external sources is Sigmund Freud, who is first brought up by Marice Gulick upon hearing how her husband, Mike, lost his latchkey. While the audience does not hear her actual reaction word-for-word, she cites *Psychology of Everyday Life* by Sigmund Freud and how one had to read that to understand what her response meant (Dos Passos 74). Freud is mentioned shortly after in a conversation between the Gulicks and their other high-class peers like Eileen Paradise and Eggy Harriman. According to Glenn, the entire conversation "was all about Freud" and terms he coined like "Oedipus complex," topics Glenn

was rather ignorant of (Dos Passos 75). The main purpose of these references was not for the references themselves, or any meaning they added to the story. Rather, they served as another reminder of the stark contrasts between the different economic worlds Glenn and the Gulicks lived in, and how much their interests varied as a result.

Other Characteristics

This novel displays other postmodern elements in addition to intertextuality, and the main one that it utilizes to a strong degree is metafiction. Metafiction is a characteristic of postmodern literature in which the author knowingly points out and draws attention to the fact that everything in the narrative is fiction and made up (Chapman). Some examples of an author using metafictional techniques would include appearing as a character within the narrative, under his or her actual name, the narrator directly speaking to the audience, or poking fun at the fact that the narrative itself is not real.

This occurs a few times, the first being when Glenn likened himself to “an actor in the play” (Dos Passos 208). This is a lighthearted remark that belies how designed the current situation felt, rather than a direct admission of the narrative being completely made up. But in the end, it still sacrifices some of the audience’s suspension of belief and draws attention to the fictional qualities of the narrative as a result. This metaphor is actually used in a similar fashion later on when Glenn reflected how “He’d been expecting something like that. He couldn’t shake off a funny feeling that he was going through a play that he had rehearsed many times” (Dos Passos 260). This usage of metafiction has a similar effect as the first, if only more heightened, since Glenn’s awareness increased from only feeling like an actor due to how the situation made him feel to feeling like there existed a play that he was actively acting out. The difference

between the two lies in how much of his own life he saw reflected in the play; in the first situation, he may have felt like an actor, but he did not suspect that he was acting in a play.

Verdict

This novel favors modernism much more than postmodernism, as shown by its abundance of the modernist qualities of reflection and determinacy and the number of examples for each criterion when compared to its meager showing for postmodern criteria, none of which were the primary postmodern criteria chosen. As mentioned before, the additional criteria added will not be used as the primary factor for determining what movement a novel leans towards, so *Adventures of a Young Man* is definitively modern. There are postmodern elements in it if one looks closely enough, but they are sparse and certainly not enough to claim this novel as postmodern.

Catch-22

Conceptualized in 1953 and published in 1963, *Catch-22* is a novel written by Joseph Heller. It follows the main protagonist, a World War II bombardier (a member of a fighter plane crew in charge of aiming and releasing bombs) named Captain John Yossarian through his many attempts to escape the war and his duty in it.

This novel is regarded throughout the literary world as one of the greatest postmodernist novels and is even cited by some as one of the “breakthrough” novels that helped catalyze the entire postmodern movement (Murray Davis 297). Despite its reputation as one of postmodernism’s hallmarks, it still possesses a few modern characteristics. Meichen Liu of the University of Science and Technology of China’s department of Foreign Languages of argues

that *Catch-22*'s main character displays "many traces of modernism," and that the novel overall contains other modern elements.

Modernism

Reflection

As Miechen Liu stated, the main character of this novel reflects modernism in a way not many main characters of supposedly postmodern novels would. As a matter of fact, Yossarian mirrors Ernest Hemingway's characters in some respects. The main similarity is the role these characters play in their respective worlds; in *Catch-22*'s, Yossarian often seems like the only sane man stuck in a world constantly plagued by chaos.

A common ritual that highlights this lies in Yossarian's various attempts to get out of the war and sent back home. What will usually happen is he will either finish the number of required missions as that number rose higher and higher with every subsequent chapter, or he will discover a loophole of sorts only to be countered with a quick "catch-22." This expression was the common counter to any character using meaning and logic throughout the entirety of *Catch-22*. Due to its arbitrary and malleable nature, it could be applied or extended to any situation, no matter how illogical the situation is. One such case is when Yossarian "fell in love" with Michaela, a poor, young maid who works in the apartments Yossarian and his unit inhabit during their stay in Rome (Heller 165). When asked if she would marry him, she insists that she cannot because she would not marry someone who is crazy, and that anyone who would want to marry her is crazy. The conversation devolves into nonsense from there, to Yossarian saying he cannot marry her either because she is crazy (Heller 167). Heller's use of it and Yossarian's attempts to

outwit it show his modern tendencies to try to apply logic and order where there would otherwise be none.

Self-Containment

Catch-22 is extremely self-contained, and almost all of its references are internal and can be traced back to the novel itself. The biggest example of this is the novel's titular term of "catch-22." This term originated and is explained in this novel, and its purpose and how it is supposed to be utilized is shown countless times. It is first introduced near the beginning of the story, explained by Doc Daneeka shortly after in the context of war as "anyone who wants to get out of combat duty isn't really crazy," and is repeated up to the end of the narrative approximately thirty times, each time with a situational twist (Heller 5, 46, 434).

Postmodernism

Indeterminacy

The question of "What difference does it make?" and any other related variations of it come out of a character's mouth at least every few chapters, and it is the perfect representation of the postmodern criterion of indeterminacy. This quality manifests itself in *Catch-22* in various ways, but the use of this expression and any variations are the most obvious.

To provide some context, this expression is usually delivered when two characters argue about the impact of "everyone [doing something] to [everyone]" versus "everyone [doing something] to [me]." (Heller 14, 17, 93, 193) The answer is almost always in the form of that expression, and the exaggerated use of it echoes the postmodern quality of everything being on the same level in regards to meaning and mattering in the grand scheme of things.

The characters simply just cannot understand the difference between “them shooting at me” compared to “them shooting at ‘everyone’,” because their perception states that the action and the end result are the same, therefore another character’s reaction to it should be the same (Heller 14). As such, why would it make a difference what the motivation is, especially when that character being shot at is already on the side under enemy fire?

Indifference

The counterpart to reflection, indifference is an opposite reaction to the principle of conditional and relative truths. As explained before, whereas reflection involves a degree of care or ambition to determine absolute truth despite the futility of that endeavor, indifference is displayed when characters do not bother to put in that same effort and – in some cases – respond with disdain when others attempt it.

A perfect example of this is the Texan. When Dunbar and Yossarian cracked the code about what was missing in this war and how no one was fighting for the right reasons, like patriotism and matrotism, he only responded to that momentary epiphany with “Who gives a shit?” (Heller 6). This is the postmodern reaction to the pursuit of deeper meaning and connotation where there may be none.

Other Characteristics

A common postmodern characteristic seen in many works is play or playfulness, and this quality mostly refers to the practice of postmodern authors treating serious subjects in a lighthearted and humorous way. There are many avenues authors use to achieve this technique, but the one Joseph Heller utilizes is in his presentation of the novel’s namesake: “catch-22.” He coined this term in this novel, and while the term’s meaning has expanded since, its original

intention was to describe the absurd bureaucratic constraints inflicted on soldiers in World War II. That is a rather serious topic, and yet its application in other cases and the characters' reactions to *Catch-22* are what make Heller's use of it playful rather than played straight.

Verdict

Due to *Catch-22* having many more postmodern qualities than modern ones, I would classify this novel as the majority of critics and analysts would: as a postmodern novel. It provides an interesting case study, however, because it displayed characteristics from both sides of the reflection versus indifference criteria set, and that placed it in an interesting position because it exhibited both characteristics almost equally, with the postmodern narrative barely winning out over the modern main character. This dual nature in that conflict opened up possibilities for draws to occur in the other criteria sets, and that was a problem that had not come close to occurring before analyzing *Catch-22*. Regardless, the other postmodern qualities the novel possesses was more than enough to deem this novel as postmodern.

Slaughterhouse-Five

Slaughterhouse-Five (1969) narrates the story of Billy Pilgrim, an unconventional protagonist who travels back and forth in time like a pendulum, constantly revisiting his life events like his birth and death and any moment in between. Its author, Kurt Vonnegut Jr., established this story using World War II as the backdrop, among other, more surreal, contexts and situations.

According to literary analysts Robert Tally, Elaheh Soofastaei, and Derek Miller, this novel is viewed as a postmodern work, along with most of Vonnegut's other works and his writing style in general, though Tally notes an interesting distinction: while Vonnegut's novels

depict a distinctly postmodern world, Vonnegut himself is actually a modernist, a contradiction that occurred due to Vonnegut's situation as an "untimely figure, a modernist in a postmodern condition" (Tally II). He argues this conflict leads to Vonnegut utilizing diverse and eccentric narrative techniques, such as metafiction, collage, and temporal slippages, which are more associated with postmodernism (Tally II). While Vonnegut may show shades of both modernism and postmodernism himself, this analysis and the other testimonies definitively point toward his works being postmodern rather modern.

Being one of his most popular works, it is expected that *Slaughterhouse-Five* will display postmodern characteristics similar to those his other popular pieces convey, such as discovering an answer to the facts of the world through science and technology (Soofastaei et al. 61).

Modernism

Determinacy

Determinacy is an interesting case in regards to *Slaughterhouse-Five* because the main foundation it can be traced back to is the novel's repetition of one of its hallmark expressions, "So it goes," a phrase recited after every recorded death (Vonnegut 2). It has a defined meaning and interpretation that Vonnegut intended to deliver, a meaning that "lies at the centre of any understanding of Vonnegut's work: fatalism, stoicism and the acceptance that no use will come of shrinking away when the worst has happened" (Clark). While never explicitly stated, this interpretation is the main one the audience should build on and confirm throughout the novel, as each death is added to the list. Some deaths occur in fantastical circumstances, such as Billy's wife, Valencia, who died in a complex chain of events that began with her hearing about Billy's hospitalization after an airplane crash on Sugarbush Mountain (Vonnegut 81). Her panicked state

after this revelation led to her speeding on the throughway as she raced to the hospital, which led to a rear collision that took out her exhaust system, which led to her dying of carbon-monoxide poisoning (Vonnegut 81).

Other deaths, however, are much more mundane and absent of any spectacular details, like Vonnegut's father, who merely died of "natural causes" (Vonnegut 93). In either case, the end result is the same: that person, "dog," "champagne," or even the "whole Universe" is dead, and the only thing one can do is accept it and move on (Vonnegut 29, 33, 53). As Charles Darwin, the most engaging Earthling figure to the Tralfamadorians, says, "Those who die are meant to die," regardless of who or what they are, when they died, or the circumstances of their deaths (Vonnegut 93).

Other Characteristics

Another chief modern trait present throughout nearly every section of *Slaughterhouse-Five* is alienation, Billy's alienation in particular. He experiences one extreme literal case of alienation when abducted by the Tralfamadorians, and another during World War II when he was taken prisoner by the Germans (Vonnegut 12). Lastly, his condition of being unstuck in time has also contributed to this theme of alienation, as that shift resulted in him experiencing the flow of time differently than those around him, in a circular fashion rather than a modern, linear one (Vonnegut 12).

The third case of alienation had the most profound effect on him and his connection to others, because it completely altered the way he perceived time, and there was no one else who truly understood what he was experiencing other than the Tralfamadorians. While this meant the Tralfamadorians could answer his questions and give him insights he would have no way of

gaining from other humans, it only furthered his disconnect from human society and their experiences, just as they were estranged from his (Vonnegut 15).

Postmodernism

Chaotic Timeline

“Billy Pilgrim has come unstuck in time” is one of the most memorable lines in the entire novel, and the phrase, “unstuck in time,” is repeated throughout various points of the story (Vonnegut 12). The word “unstuck” stands out in particular because it carries a very interesting connotation, especially when considered in the context of the situation.

Billy first became unstuck during World War II, and the experience swung his attention “grandly through the full arc of his life, passing into death [before] Billy swung into life again, going backwards until he was in pre-birth” (Vonnegut 20). Since this experience, Billy swung through time, his mind flashing to various points within his history before flashing forward again. Yet, he did not have the insight to truly understand the implications of this until he encountered the Tralfamadorians, who introduced a surreal perception of time that frames both Billy’s newfound and structure and timeline of the narrative (Vonnegut 15).

According to the Tralfamadorians, “All moments, past, present and future, always have existed, [and] always will exist” (Vonnegut 13). This assertion is very postmodern in its outlook because it refuses to distinguish the different states of time and also defines the correct time flow as circular (or reversible) rather than linear, which would be the modern and usual perception of time and how it flowed from moment to moment.

A signifier of this chaotic and disorganized nature of time from a structural perspective rather than a narrative perspective is showcased in how events in the story are ordered and

presented to the audience. To give a glimpse of just how disorganized the narrative can be, in the span of seven pages, the audience is shown scenes of Billy as a baby being bathed by his mother, as a middle-aged optometrist, as a young child, and three years after the war, all in that order (Vonnegut 38-45). This pendulum swinging the audience back and forth between events mirrors the reversible quality time exhibits when viewed through the postmodern perspective and reflects Billy's own experiences, giving the audience a taste of what it would be like to live in a circular timeline instead of a linear one.

The modern concept of time is subverted and discredited several times, to further push the postmodern perspective. It is asserted as "just an illusion we have here on Earth that one moment follows another one, like beads on a string, and that once a moment is gone it is gone forever..." (Vonnegut 13). Calling it an illusion calls into question how we structure our lives, especially when so many aspects of them are designated by our illusion-fueled concept of time. Even Billy's perception of time, as it jumped forward years and backward months, had to conform to the disillusioned standard of time followed on Earth. After all, "As an Earthling, [Billy] had to believe whatever clocks said – and calendars" (Vonnegut 11).

Intertextuality

The first few pages of *Slaughterhouse-Five* have no less than three external references. One is the epigraph, another is a limerick that likens the way Vonnegut wants to write about Dresden to the way a man would want to write silly poetry about his genitals, and the third is the recitation of a song:

My name is Yon Yonson,
I work in Wisconsin,
I work in a lumbermill there.

The people I meet when I walk down the street,
They say, 'What's your name?
And I say,
'My name is Yon Yonson,
I work in Wisconsin (Vonnegut 3).

After introducing it, the narrative references it several other times, and it is one of the few external sources to be referred to more than once throughout all the novels analyzed. However, its meaning goes beyond that, as it also serves as a motif symbolizing the recursive, time-repeating structure of the story. It accomplishes this through the structure of the song itself, as “Yon Yonson” can be sung in an infinite, recursive loop, because the ending lines of the song loop right into its opening lines. Billy’s story and his many flashbacks to the past, present and future can be viewed similarly, as endless and circular loops that can end where they begin.

Other Characteristics

Slaughterhouse-Five has the most direct examples of metafiction of any of the novels analyzed in this thesis, and this trend directly coincides with Robert Tally’s earlier assertion that one of Vonnegut’s most distinctive postmodern techniques was metafiction (165). The entirety of the first chapter involves Kurt Vonnegut addressing the audience directly about the truth of the story this novel tells, or at least the truth of the “war parts, anyway” (Vonnegut 2). Along with this claim, he details his struggles of trying to write a book about the destruction of Dresden, a decidedly postmodern technique.

Once the story shifts to Billy Pilgrim, Kurt Vonnegut does not utilize metafiction as much as he did in the first chapter, but he does speak to the audience directly once again when he

notes to them that the “American near Billy wailed that he had excreted everything but his brains. [...] That was I. That was me. That was the author of this book” (Vonnegut 56).

Verdict

Slaughterhouse-Five is, by far, a postmodern piece. Given its time of publishing and its author, this conclusion is not surprising that the criteria this novel fulfills more postmodern criteria and shows a much higher prevalence for postmodern characteristics overall.

Lincoln in the Bardo

The last book in the sequence to be analyzed is *Lincoln in the Bardo*, which was published very recently in 2017 by George Saunders. It won its year’s Man Booker Prize, a literary prize awarded to the best original novel written in the English language (Man Booker Prize). This prize thrust Saunders and his novel into the national spotlight and led to many lauding its unique charms and individuality. It earned these praises through its experimental telling of the story of the death of Willie Lincoln, President Abraham Lincoln’s son, and how he and his father react and adapt to the tragedy as the American Civil War rages on in the background.

While published in the age of postmodernism, it displays characteristics of both movements. However, this analysis will be the final determining factor that decides whether the current field of American literature takes more inspiration from modernism, postmodernism, or from a completely new movement.

Modernism

Determinacy

There are a number of themes present and pushed by *Lincoln in the Bardo*'s narrative. Each one has a substantial impact on the main plot and its characters, and practically every event that occurs and section of narration in the novel contributes to one or more of these themes.

A few of these themes include loss, vice and virtue, and transition and impermanence. George Saunders injected almost every sentence in this novel's narration with meaning, and these are the novel's chief three themes that have the most contributed to them, due to their roles in the narrative being so intertwined through Abraham and Willie Lincoln and the progression of their characters throughout *Lincoln in the Bardo*.

Both Abraham and Willie Lincoln's struggles revolve around the themes of transition and impermanence, but every major character is in a state of transition in some way. Abraham Lincoln's conflict dealt with how he took Willie for granted, as if he would always be a permanent presence in his life, rather than as "just a passing, temporary energy-burst" who would eventually be lost to time as all impermanent beings are (Saunders 504). Meanwhile, this conflict of transition afflicted Willie and the other ghosts through their presence in the Bardo, a transitional state of existence that lies between death and rebirth. The ghosts are indefinitely stuck in the Bardo until they accept their fate and the truth of their deaths and move on to the next plain of existence (Saunders 396).

This conflict is resolved by the novel's conclusion, as Willie realizes they are all dead and alerts all of the other ghosts (Saunders 609). While some are initially hesitant, most of them, including the main characters of Hans Vollman, Reverend Everly Thomas, and Roger Bevins III,

move on from the Bardo in a “blinding blast of the matterlightblooming phenomenon” (Saunders 615). This use of eccentric terminology highlights how foreign and wrong it originally seemed to the ghosts when they watched others move on from the Bardo and onto the next plain of existence, and yet each character views this phenomenon with acceptance by the time they experience it themselves. Abraham Lincoln also moves past this struggle once he acknowledged his son’s death just as his son had, and that there was no purpose in visiting his son’s coffin at Georgetown Cemetery constantly. It would not let him be with his son, as Willie “was no more here than anyplace else, that is. There was nothing special, anymore, about this place” (Saunders 624). This realization occurred to him after Willie had already transitioned from the Bardo, so while Abraham would have no true way of knowing, there was really nothing left for him there, and his continued wallowing there for his son had only served as “a detour and a weakness” (Saunders 625).

This is not the only theme explored with Abraham and Willie, as the theme of transition and impermanence connect to the other major two: loss, and vice and virtue. Beginning with the former, loss is the catalyst that launched the lessons and developments both characters underwent. Abraham Lincoln would never have realized how inaccurately he had viewed his son, as a permanent rather than a temporary presence, until he lost him. This is reaffirmed “at bedtime, when the boy would normally present himself for some talk or roughhousing,” and only then did Mr. Lincoln seem to truly realize the “irreversibility of the loss” (Saunders 127). This in-the-moment insight shows that he would not have become mindful of this error in his perception without the loss; without it, he would have continued viewing Willie as an unwavering force until the day of his inevitable death.

These two themes are then connected to vice and virtue through their emotional reactions to the loss. The characters in *Lincoln in the Bardo* exemplify the fact that humans are made up of contradictions, of shades of gray rather than black and white. For every positive quality displayed, there is likely to be a negative one to balance it out. For all of Abraham Lincoln's good virtues, his vices are what receive the most focus throughout the narrative, and Saunders confronts them in two different ways. The first is through ridiculing his behavior and actions as President while he was grieving for Willie. There is a chapter solely dedicated to testimonies tearing him apart, deeming him "the weakest man who has ever been elected" and a "dictator" whom the "founders look on in dismay," as well as blaming him for a "dithering mismanagement of the war effort" (Saunders 482, 484, 488). These images paint an unusual picture that veers away from how modern readers view Lincoln and serve to humanize him, bringing him down from the historical figure everyone has learned about to a regular, flawed human being. Despite all his accomplishments, he was not always the successful and respectable figure he is viewed as today.

The second front through which his vices are explored is through his emotional weakness when regarding his own son's death. In the beginning, he lived in denial of the truth, insisting that his child was here, "just as he was" in life and that he has "found him again" (Saunders 107). This inability to move on and recognize that his son is no longer really there is what kept his mind and world "freshly inclined toward sorrow" (Saunders 626). Once he gets past this denial, he is able to move on and lead America towards victory in the war, returning him to the pedestal of greatness on which modern audiences would usually place him. In other words, it refocuses the narrative's lens back to his virtues and away from his vices, and shows how a lack of

acceptance for the former two themes of loss and transition and impermanence can inhibit a character from achieving their inner potential.

The unity of these themes and how they all link the characters, settings, and events together to form the whole narrative is a distinctly modern characteristic.

Other Characteristics

Experimentation is another characteristic that this novel displays to a high degree. According to Josh Rahn, a writer with a Master's Degree in English Literature, and many others, experimentation, especially with genre and form, is "another defining characteristic of Modernist literature."

Lincoln in the Bardo takes on a very experimental structure, both in terms of writing style and presentation and how the narrative frames its events and characters. First off, the novel does not utilize traditional narration; instead, it is comprised completely of quotes followed by one-line citations. Most of the quotes read like dialogue found in other novels, though interruptions are a common occurrence. The typical chapter in *Lincoln in the Bardo* looks like this:

On the day of the beam, Polk had been President. But now, I knew (with a dazzling clarity) that Polk had been succeeded by *Taylor*, and Taylor by *Fillmore*, and Fillmore by *Pierce* –

hans vollman

After which, Pierce had been succeeded by *Buchanan*, and Buchanan by –

roger bevins iii

Lincoln!

hans vollman

President Lincoln!

roger bevins iii

The rail line ran beyond Buffalo now –
hans vollman
Far beyond!
roger bevins iii (Saunders 363)

These quotes are either delivered by the novel's characters, such as Hans Vollman and Roger Bevins III, or they originate from external sources, such as other writers, novelists, or journalists. To paint a better picture of how often external sources are used, there are approximately 210 external citations and 60 unique authors used throughout *Lincoln in the Bardo*. The works referenced most were Margaret Leech's *Reveille in Washington* (1941) and Elizabeth Keckley's *Behind the Scenes, or, Thirty Years a Slave, And Four Years in the White House* (1868). Both were cited over fifteen times and used throughout the entirety of *Lincoln in the Bardo*, with each piece's first citation occurring near the narrative's beginning and their last citations near the end (Saunders 33, 591, 601). Saunders did not use other works as heavily, but each referenced piece got an average use of approximately five citations. These numbers were gathered and updated during my read-through of the novel, since there is no master list for either the works used or how many total citations there were.

This narrative style is unique, even when compared to George Saunders' other works, to the point where many reviewers, including writers Jenny Shank, Jeffrey Somers, and Bill Capossere, declare it to be one of the most unique pieces of fiction that they have read, calling it unsurprising that George Saunders, "celebrated for his wild, daring short stories," was able to craft such a book (Shank). A big factor for this distinction is credited to the "unique structure" through which the story delivers its narration (Capossere).

Postmodernism

Intertextuality

Many chapters of *Lincoln in the Bardo* are comprised solely of excerpts from other sources, both real and fictional. In a February 2016 phone interview with *The Seattle Times*, Saunders revealed that he “loved the idea of the reader and writer playing this elaborate game,” and that he was “inventing these sources, but maybe you don’t know it” (Macdonald).

With this intention, George Saunders puts his own, even more postmodern, spin on this criterion in *Lincoln in the Bardo*. This is especially true when one considers how much of the entire novel consists of external citations. At least one in every four chapters was dedicated to those citations, so approximately one quarter of the novel was nothing but intertextuality. Yet while most of the instances of intertextuality were distinctly separated from the other narration through having dedicated chapters to them, George Saunders organized the citations in a way that wove into the narrative to enhance the meaning, rather than detract or distract from it.

These displays of this criterion were very effective for one other reason, in addition to superb organization: it injected an otherwise fictional biography with references to historical perspectives that served to ground the narrative and give it a foundation for the rest of the surreal elements of the narrative to stand on and feel more grounded in reality.

Verdict

Lincoln in the Bardo is, for the most part, a modern novel. It boasts many modern characteristics, albeit in a different form than the characteristics displayed by the earlier modern novels analyzed. I reckon this disparity occurred because while this novel was modern, many of its modern characteristics had slight postmodern spins put on them. As a result, *Lincoln in the*

Bardo is fittingly more of a transitional novel stuck between the two movements rather than a solid addition to either one. However, if one had to attribute it to one movement, it has many more ties to modernism than postmodernism.

CONCLUSION

The original question that guided this project was whether postmodernism was one of the driving forces behind current American literature, with the main deciding factor for this question being what the final verdict on *Lincoln on the Bardo* would be. Since that verdict declared that the novel displayed a higher degree of modernism than postmodernism, we can conclude that current American literature is still influenced by modernism and the literary trends associated with it. However, a caveat to this conclusion is the fact that so many have noted *Lincoln in the Bardo* to be one of the more experimental novels of the decade. That experimental nature of the work is one of the primary factors designating it as a modernist work. While it can be asserted that current American literature is more influenced by modernism, most novels will not contribute to the movement as much as *Lincoln and the Bardo*. In addition, even if modernism is a more prominent influencer, that does not mean that postmodernism and its respective qualities cannot be found in literature written today.

Overall, I would say that I have objectively completed what I had set out to accomplish when I took on this project. However, there are several factors that limit the extent through which we can ensure the correct conclusion was reached. The biggest one is the small sample size of only four control group novels and one test novel. This limitation was implemented due to time constraints, but this does result in the findings being less reliable than they would otherwise be with a larger sample size. Another was that only two movements were considered and analyzed; I think increasing the number of possible categorizations to use would be more suitable for determining where current American literature lies. Of course, the issue with that is that there is no consensus on what postmodernism is, let alone what post-postmodernism is.

When post-postmodernism, the current movement said to follow postmodernism, is more clearly defined, I think these kinds of analyses would heed better, more thorough, results.

Even upon its conclusion, this thesis has still not scratched the surface of many areas of related research. For instance, this thesis only concerned itself with the literary world, and another project could extend the questions this thesis asked further by applying those questions to other fields, like art and music and how prevalent modern and postmodern influences are on those in today's modern world. Alternatively, the project could extend to other avenues within literature by looking at the rates of these movements' characteristics within specific literary genres or countries other than the United States.

Any of these areas would be worthy future academic pursuits, as they would give us a better understanding of the world we currently live in, and how the current cultural movements affect the other facets of our society.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Capossere, Bill. "Lincoln in the Bardo: A uniquely structured tale of great empathy." *Fantasy Literature*, 2017, <http://www.fantasyliterature.com/reviews/lincoln-in-the-bardo/>. Accessed 6 May 2019.

Chapman, Harvey. "What is Metafiction?" *Novel Writing Help*, <https://www.novel-writing-help.com/metafiction.html>. Accessed 15 Apr. 2019.

Clark, Alex. "Kurt Vonnegut: So it goes." *The Guardian*, 14 Apr. 2007, <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2007/apr/15/fiction.kurtvonnegut>. Accessed 2 May 2019.

"Determinacy and Indeterminacy – A Comparison of the Narrative Voice in *The Stone Angel* and *The Stone Diaries*." *Association for Canadian Studies in China*, <http://www.zhuodadx.com/cs/64121.html>. Accessed 6 May 2019.

Fedosova, Tatyana. "Reflection of Time in Postmodern Literature." *Athens Journal of Philology*, vol. 2, no. 2, pp. 77-88, Jun. 2015, DOI: 10.30958/ajp.2-2-1.

Hassan, Ihab. *The Postmodern Turn: Essays in Postmodern Culture*. Ohio State University Press, 1987.

Heller, Joseph. *Catch-22*. Simon & Schuster, 1961.

Hemingway, Ernest. *For Whom the Bell Tolls*. Charles Scribner's Sons, 1940.

Hemingway, Ernest. *The Sun Also Rises*. Simon & Schuster, 1926.

- Irvine, Martin. "Postmodernity vs. the Postmodern vs. Postmodernism." *Georgetown University*, <http://faculty.georgetown.edu/irvinem/theory/pomo.html>. Accessed 21 Apr. 2019.
- J.S., Eric. "Apathy the Postmodern Condition." *Seemingly Impossible Questions*, 18 Nov. 2011, <http://seeminglyimpossiblequestions.blogspot.com/2011/11/apathy-postmodern-condition.html>. Accessed 23 Mar. 2019.
- Liu, Meichen. "Catch-22: A Nod to Modernism." *ANQ: A Quarterly Journal of Short Articles, Notes and Reviews*, vol. 31, no. 2, 3 Nov. 2017, pp. 118-122, DOI: 10.1080/0895769X.2017.1374161.
- Lorcher, Trent. "Modernism in Literature: What Are Characteristics of Modernism in Writing?" *Bright Hub Education*, 17 Mar. 2009, www.brighthubeducation.com/high-school-english-lessons/29453-modernism-in-literature/. Accessed 19 Jan. 2019.
- Ma, Li. "Indeterminacy in Postmodern Fiction." *Journal of Language Teaching and Research*, vol. 4, no. 6, 2013, pp. 1338–1342, DOI:10.4304/jltr.4.6.1338-1342.
- Macdonald, Moira. "166 voices add up to 1 tale of grief: George Saunders on 'Lincoln in the Bardo.'" *The Seattle Times*, 16 Feb. 2017, <https://www.seattletimes.com/entertainment/books/166-voices-add-up-to-1-tale-of-grief-george-saunders-on-lincoln-in-the-bardo/>. Accessed 23 Apr. 2019.
- Man Booker Prize. "Lincoln in the Bardo wins 2017 Man Booker Prize." *The Man Booker Prize*, 17 Oct. 2017, <https://themanbookerprize.com/news/lincoln-bardo-wins-2017-man-booker-prize>. Accessed 7 May 2019.

- Miller, Derek D. "Postmodernism in Vonnegut's Cat's Cradle." *Inquiries Journal/Student Pulse*, vol. 3, no. 4, 2011, <http://www.inquiriesjournal.com/articles/512/postmodernism-in-vonneguts-cats-cradle>. Accessed 18 Apr. 2019.
- Murray Davis, Robert. "When Was Postmodernism?" *World Literature Today*, vol. 75, no. 2, 2001, pp. 295-298, DOI: 10.2307/40156532.
- Novak, Sophie. "Intertextuality As A Literary Device." *The Write Practice*, 2013, <https://thewritepractice.com/intertextuality-as-a-literary-device/>. Accessed 9 Feb. 2019.
- Passos, John Dos. *Adventures of a Young Man: A Novel*. Open Road Distribution, 2015.
- Pizer, Donald. *Toward a Modernist Style: John Dos Passos*. Bloomsbury Academic, 24 Oct. 2013.
- Qureshi, Rozina. "USA Postmodernism." *Academia.edu*. https://www.academia.edu/7167101/USA_Postmodernism. Accessed 16 Apr. 2019.
- Rahn, Josh. "Modernism – Literature Periods & Movements." *The Literature Network*, 2011, <http://www.online-literature.com/periods/modernism.php>. Accessed 14 Feb. 2019.
- Saunders, George. *Lincoln in the Bardo*. Random House, 2017.
- Shank, Jenny. "Man Booker prize-winning 'Lincoln in the Bardo' is weird, wonderful, strange and stirring. In short, it's George Saunders." *Dallas News*, Oct. 2017, <https://www.dallasnews.com/arts/books/2017/02/14/lincoln-bardo-george-saunders-review-dallas>. Accessed 30 Apr. 2019.

Somers, Jeffrey. "How to Read George Saunders' "Lincoln in the Bardo"." *ThoughtCo*, 22 Jul. 2018, <https://www.thoughtco.com/how-to-read-george-saunders-first-novel-and-lincoln-in-the-bardo-and-4134440>. Accessed 24 Apr. 2019.

Soofastaei, Elaheh, et al. "Reflection of Postmodernism in Kurt Vonnegut's Selected Fictions. Research Result." *Theoretical and Applied Linguistics Series*, vol. 2, Jan. 2016, pp. 61 – 66, DOI: 10.18413/2313-8912-2016-2-2-61-66.

Tally, Robert T., Jr. "Preface." Preface. *Kurt Vonnegut and the American Novel: A Postmodern Iconography*. Bloomsbury Academic, 6 Jun. 2013.

Taunton, Matthew. "Modernism, time and consciousness: the influence of Henri Bergson and Marcel Proust." *The British Library*, 25 May 2016, <https://www.bl.uk/20th-century-literature/articles/modernism-time-and-consciousness-the-influence-of-henri-bergson-and-marcel-proust>. Accessed 10 Mar. 2019.

Toynbee, Arnold. *A Study of History*. Vol. 2, Oxford University Press, 1933.

Vonnegut, Kurt, Jr. *Slaughterhouse-Five or The Children's Crusade: A Duty-Dance with Death*. Dell Publishing, 1969.